

MONTANA

Best Beginnings State Advisory Council

Proposal

7/22/2010

Montana's proposal to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to carry out the activities of a State Advisory Council under the Head Start Act

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Montana Best Beginnings State Advisory Council

Abstract

The State of Montana seeks to enhance an already established early childhood advisory council. In Montana, the Governor's office defines early childhood with the overarching concept of "Best Beginnings", therefore, the restructured state advisory council will be renamed the Best Beginnings State Advisory Council to demonstrate the expanded focus. The Best Beginnings State Advisory Council will be managed through the Department of Public Health and Human Services, Early Childhood Services Bureau, and will have provisions for formalized community advisory council capacity in at least four communities, linked to the state council.

The strategic goal is that Montana shall have a comprehensive, coordinated early childhood system that provides a governance structure and leads to strong collaboration in order to best meet the needs of Montana's youngest citizens, and includes four system **principal objectives:**

- 1) Children have access to high quality Early Childhood Programs.
- 2) Families with young children are supported in their community.
- 3) Children have access to a medical home and health insurance.
- 4) Social, emotional, and mental health needs of young children and families are supported.

Subordinate objectives include a comprehensive scan of needs assessments and strategic planning to align needed activities with the future direction of the newly formed Best Beginnings Advisory Council.

Montana Best Beginnings State Advisory Council

Project Description

The State of Montana currently has an early childhood advisory council, whose primary function is to advise the Child Care and Development Fund activities (CCDF), the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grant, the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the Head Start State Collaboration (HSSC) grant. The council in its current form has been in existence since 1996. The State of Montana has been fortunate to operate with an advisory council in this capacity; however, as the early childhood systems work continues to grow in Montana, there is opportunity to enhance and strengthen the early childhood advisory capacity in our state. Necessary restructuring must occur, not only to meet the intent of the Head Start Reauthorization Act, but to strengthen the effectiveness of the council and its activities. This state advisory council funding opportunity provides the systemic leverage to restructure and enhance Montana's early childhood advisory council construct.

The general intent of this grant proposal is to continue operating a state advisory council for early childhood education, care, and systems through the Department of Public Health and Human Services, Early Childhood Services Bureau. The Early Childhood Services Bureau provides leadership and oversight of our early childhood initiatives in the state; and serves as a partner in other larger early childhood systemic work such as full-time kindergarten through our State Department of Education (Office of Public Instruction), the Public Health Home Visiting work through our Maternal and Child Health Bureau, and the Systems of Care Grant through the Children's Mental Health Bureau. Other early childhood stakeholder collaborative councils or work groups include: the Early Childhood Partnership for Professional

Development, through the Office of Public Instruction focused on enhancing the professional competencies of individuals who provide quality care and education for young children and families. The School Readiness State Taskforce and local School Readiness teams through the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant; Family Support Services Advisory Council focused on disability services for children 0-3 (Part C of the IDEA); the Early Care and Education Career Development Advisory Council which provides guidance to the Early Childhood Project at Montana State University.

As in most states, Montana is not alone in its organizational structure of having early childhood services spread across governmental and non-profit agencies that are generally driven by funding streams and/or legislation. The Governor's office is committed to strengthening early childhood services through improved collaboration and coordination and believes that restructuring our existing advisory council efforts is fiscally and administratively appropriate. In Montana, the Governor's office defines early childhood with the overarching concept of "Best Beginnings", therefore, the restructured state advisory council will be renamed the Best Beginnings State Advisory Council to demonstrate the expanded focus. Generally, activities resulting from the council's direction and related to early childhood are deemed Best Beginnings activities.

Need for Assistance

Several state offices and projects have conducted needs assessment reports, some more formally than others. The following data is taken from the Montana 2009 Needs Assessment,

Montana Head Start/Early Head Start Training and Technical Assistance State-based Office¹ and the Executive Summary of the *Investments in Early Childhood* Montana Early Care and Education Economic Impact Study², and the Montana Head Start State Collaboration Needs Assessment, 2008 Report³. Currently, the Montana Maternal and Child Health Bureau is collecting information for a new needs assessment.

Population

Montana's 145,552 square miles makes it the fourth largest state in the United States. In 2002, Montana's population was 902,195 with 2008 estimating an increase of 7.2%⁴.

Race/Ethnicity

Montana's population is primarily white, making up 90.5% of the total population. The Native American Population comprises 6.4% of the population and is the largest minority group in the state. Montana is home to seven Indian Reservations and various tribes as indicated below⁵:

Blackfeet Reservation: Blackfeet

Crow Reservation: Crow

Flathead Reservation: Salish, Pend d'Oreille, Kootenai

Fort Belknap Reservation: White Clay (Gros Ventre) and Assiniboine

¹ Montana Head Start/Early Head Start Training and Technical Assistance State-based Office (2009). *Montana head start/early head start needs assessment*. Unpublished.

² Montana Department of Health and Human Services. (May 2008). *Investments in early childhood: The economic impact of the early care and education industry in montana*. Retrieved from http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/documents/economicimpactstudyfinal_001.pdf

³ Montana Head Start State Collaboration Office (2008). *Montana head start collaboration 2008 needs assessment report* (2008). Retrieved from <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/headstart/documents/2008needsassessmentreport.pdf>

⁴ Montana Department of Labor and Industry (2009). Retrieved from www.dli.mt.gov

⁵ Office of Public instruction (2009). Retrieved from www.opi.gov

Fort Peck Reservation: Nakoda (Assiniboine) and Dakota (Sioux)

Northern Cheyenne Reservation: Northern Cheyenne

Rocky Boy's Reservation: Chippewa Cree

The Little Shell Band of Chippewa Indians are landless, but headquartered in Cascade County.

Economics

Unemployment rates in Montana have shifted from 4.4% in 2004 to 6.9% in 2009⁶. In 1990 the average wage in Montana was \$23,260; in 2000 it was \$24,264; and in 2007 it was \$32,223. When compared to the rest of the nation, Montana ranks 49th in terms of personal income⁷. The federal guidelines define families living in poverty if their family income is below the federal poverty threshold. The federal poverty level for a family of four with two children was \$22,050 in 2009. Families and children are defined as low-income if the family income is less than twice the federal poverty threshold. According to the National Center for Poverty, 17% of Montana families live in poverty and of the families with children under the age of 6, 20% live in poverty. Overall, 51% of families with children under the age of 6 are living in either low-income or poor families⁸. In addition to the information related to children in poverty, according to the recent Montana economic impact report, *Investments in Early Childhood*, "68,400 children live in families in which every parent works, which represents 64% of all

⁶ Montana Department of Labor (2009). Retrieved from www.dli.mt.gov

⁷ Montana Department of Labor (2009). Retrieved from www.dli.mt.gov

⁸ Definitions and statistics retrieved from the National Center for Children in Poverty (2010). Retrieved from www.nccp.org

children”.⁹ Further, more than one fifth of all unscheduled absences from work are due to family issues, costing businesses money and productivity” (Investments in Early Childhood, 2008). The cost of child care is an increasing burden on families. “Childcare costs consume an average of 7.5% of the total family income. For low-income families; however, these costs rise to more than 25% of total income.”¹⁰

School Readiness

Montana has determined that school readiness is not just about children entering school ready to learn, but understands that children enter school with a variety of developmental needs and life circumstances. To support children in school readiness means to support the “whole child” and their families. Children need stable families, access to good health care, positive early learning experiences, and early intervention services for those with special needs. Related to collaboration for health care, the *Head Start State Collaboration Needs Assessment* (2008)¹¹ shows that difficulty exists in linking children to dental homes and in partnering with oral health professionals to support young children in oral health. This issue is exacerbated by the rural nature of our state. Other needs that can be addressed under the broad scope of school readiness include: homelessness, family literacy, public assistance, transitioning and alignment with the K-12 system, and social emotional development support.

System partners

⁹ Montana Department of Health and Human Services. (May 2008). *Investments in early childhood: The economic impact of the early care and education industry in montana*. Retrieved from http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/documents/economicimpactstudyfinal_001.pdf

¹⁰ Penn State University (2010) *Employer options for childcare: Effective strategies for recruitment and retention*. Retrieved from www.betterkidcare.psu.edu/Employer_Options.pdf

¹¹ The Head Start State Collaboration offices conduct an annual needs assessment with Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The Montana 2008 report is retrieved from <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/headstart/documents/2008needsassessmentreport.pdf>

Montana is one of 12 states that does not fund a public pre-K program¹²; however, Montana has a strong network of early childhood partners working together to promote a unified system of early childhood in the state. Montana's Early Childhood Services Bureau is instrumental in bringing together early childhood stakeholders within the state and coordinating the vision of the state's early childhood priorities. There are several early childhood partners working together, of which the state advisory council is an overarching contribution. Details on the advisory council are included further in the project description. Government partners include:

- Governor's Office Policy Advisors including Health, Community Service, and Education provide executive level leadership related to early childhood, education, and the workforce; and provide valuable direction, support, and connection to other branch leaders, boards and councils, and philanthropy. The Governor's Office recently submitted the Race to the Top Grant which demonstrates linkages between early childhood, K-12, and beyond in meeting the needs of the whole child, and includes cross system longitudinal data plans.
- Governor's Office on Economic Development serves to advise the Governor on policy issues related to economic development; lead the state's business recruitment, retention, expansion, and start-up efforts; and serves as the state's primary economic development liaison between federal, state, and local agencies, Montana tribal governments, private nonprofit economic development organizations and the private sector. The Economic Development office also focuses on workforce development and

¹² National Center for Children in Poverty (2009). Retrieved from www.nccp.org

serves as a partner in addressing the economic impact and development opportunities related to the early childhood industry. The Governor's Economic Development Office partnered in commissioning the Montana Early Childhood Economic Impact Study.

- Department of Public Health & Human Services (DPHHS) providing leadership and direction for the agency, and oversees the four overarching goals of the Department: 1) All Montana children are healthy, safe and in permanent loving homes. 2) All Montanans have the tools and support to be as self sufficient as possible. 3) All Montanans are injury free, healthy, and have access to quality health care. 4) All Montanans can contribute to the above through community service. Many of the State of Montana's Best Beginnings Services are administered through DPHHS including: Maternal and Child Health Programs (WIC, Home Visiting, Immunizations), Emergency Preparedness, Part C of the IDEA, Developmental Disabilities, Children's Mental Health, Healthy Montana Kids (Medicaid and SCHIP), Child & Family Services including foster/adoptive care and the Children's Trust Fund, TANF, SNAP, Early Childhood Services, Prevention Resource Center, Quality Assurance Child Care Licensing.
- Office of Public Instruction (OPI) is the state's Department of Education. The mission of OPI is to provide vision, advocacy, support and leadership for schools and communities to ensure that all students meet today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities. OPI is a valuable partner in early childhood work and engages in projects such as Early Reading First, the Montana Behavior Initiative, full time Kindergarten, kindergarten standards, Part B of the IDEA services, and has committed to a P-20 agenda focusing primarily on supporting children and families through transitions.

- Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) serves as a partner through its Apprenticeship efforts, by working with DPHHS in offering a registered Child Care Development Specialist (CCDS) Apprenticeship Program as a strategy for linking high quality, well-trained caregivers with the possibility of increased compensation, job security and career enhancement opportunities. The program offers a national CCDS certificate that is recognized in all 50 states, and provides correlation to the Montana Early Care and Education Practitioner Registry. The Office of Head Start has accepted the MT CCDS as an equivalent to a CDA credential. DOLI also facilitates the State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) which has determined the following goals: 1) Engage the workforce system in anticipating and responding to businesses' current and emerging needs for skilled workers, 2) Encourage alignment among workforce development, post secondary education, and economic development, 3) Advance workforce development policies by providing recommendations to the Governor and other state leaders who support economic development efforts in Montana. SWIB has identified the early childhood industry as a priority in meeting the stated goals.

Other partners include:

- Montana Head Start State Collaboration Office which works to ensure that Head Start and Early Head Start programs have a connection to state government. The State Collaboration office works with grantees, state government, and other key partners to build and support integrated, effective Early Childhood Systems. The HSSC focuses on ten federally determined areas including: Health Care, Homelessness, Welfare, Child

Welfare, Child Care, Family Literacy, Disabilities, Community Services, Education, and Professional Development. The HSSC Office is contracted through the Early Childhood Services Bureau and is housed in the state early childhood services office complex. The HSSC Director also serves as the Early Childhood Comprehensive Services Coordinator through a contract.

- The Montana Early Childhood Project (ECP) at Montana State University is dedicated to improving the quality of programs and services for Montana's young children and families. The ECP collaborates with other state partners to increase awareness of a skilled workforce, thereby raising the status and compensation for early childhood practitioners, as well as promoting early childhood as a critical profession in our society.

The ECP oversees and manages the following components:

- The Montana Early Care & Education Career Path - a framework for recording and recognizing experience, training, and education. It describes 9 levels that chart a course for an individual developing a plan for professional growth in early care and education.
- The Practitioner Registry helps individuals document a record of their training, education, and work experience by verifying their achievements and placing them on the Career Path. Recognition of practitioners' accomplishments are acknowledged with a certificate useful to employers, parents, supervisors, and to verify eligibility for many state initiated Best Beginnings programs, targeting quality improvement and professional development.

- The Training Approval System, which identifies non-college credit training statewide in the Knowledge Base content areas through an application and review process¹³.
- Workforce Incentives through the newly revised Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program, a state initiated quality rating improvement system. The Early Childhood Project provides for professional development incentive awards to support practitioners in their pursuit of gaining comprehensive and advanced training and professional development. Other incentives focus on combinations of experience and education, and provide for support for accreditation scholarships and Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials. A chart of the overall Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program structure and incentives is provided in Appendix 1.
- Leadership and Standards Development through a variety of efforts including a statewide Director's Symposium, creation of a comprehensive Preschool Teacher Curriculum, development of Early Learning Guidelines 0-5, and co-writing Early Learning Guideline Implementation Curriculum.
- Professional Membership Organizations including the Montana Association for the Education of Young Children, the Montana Head Start Association, and the Montana Child Care Association who provide resources and advocacy for the early care and education community.

¹³ The Montana Early Childhood Project (2010). Retrieved from www.mtecp.org

- The Montana Child Care Resource & Referral Network (MCCRRN) provides statewide leadership in strengthening local resource and referral agencies for the purpose of collectively building a diverse, high quality early care and education system accessible to all Montana families. MCCRRN is a statewide network of community based child care resource and referral agencies. Agencies help low income families find and pay for child care, offer referral services to licensed and registered child care facilities, and support child care providers through training, technical assistance, and coaching.¹⁴
- School Readiness teams in local communities throughout the state have been working for the last several years to systematically address services and needs related to school readiness. Additionally, School Readiness local teams are connected to each other and statewide initiatives through ongoing communication, meetings, and annual events led by the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant. School Readiness teams vary in membership across the state, but many have membership from business, education, child care, Head Start or Early Head Start, family support, disability services, and other family serving agencies.
- Center on Inclusion in Early Childhood- Child Care Plus+ envisions a world where meeting the needs of every child is a natural part of everyday life. Child Care Plus+ strives to expand child care options for children with disabilities and their families, provide training and technical assistance for child care providers and other early

¹⁴ Montana Childcare (2010). Retrieved from www.montanachildcare.com

childhood professionals. The Center has developed a nationally reorganized curriculum on inclusion that supports programs individualized for young children.¹⁵

- Bureau of Business and Economic Research/ Kids Count Data through the University of Montana provides evaluation for the ECCS/HSSC grant and has taken a leadership role in facilitating community and business awareness and understanding of the vital role early childhood plays in supporting business and communities.
- Montana Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium is sponsored by the Early Childhood Project to convene two year, four year and tribal colleges with early childhood education programs in Montana. Work in this group focuses on issues in early childhood higher education, teacher preparation, statewide standardization when appropriate, common course numbering, access to early childhood coursework and degrees at all levels. The consortium strives to build alignment with national standards in the field for teacher preparation and to ensure that early childhood course work is available across the state to meet rising workforce demands.

Current state activities

As part of Montana's Early Childhood Comprehensive System grant, the School Readiness initiative evolved in 2006 and Montana was one of three states selected by the National Governor's Association (NGA) to support state leaders in building comprehensive,

¹⁵ Child Care Plus (2010). Retrieved from www.childcareplus.org

coordinated early childhood systems. Three key goals for building a comprehensive and coordinated system of early childhood were outlined:¹⁶

- Integrating statewide visions and systems into a comprehensive and sustainable early childhood education system;
- Generating, utilizing, and effectively communicating data, trends, and outcomes to support forward movement on the statewide agenda;
- Analyzing and addressing governance issues in early childhood systems of state government.

Please refer to [Appendix 2](#) for the Best Beginnings Strategic vision chart. The NGA grant and the ECCS grant priorities launched Montana to a higher systemic review of early childhood and have served as the impetus for focused collaboration efforts and initiatives in the following categories: 1) Health & Medical Homes, 2) Mental Health and Social/Emotional Support, 3) Early Care and Education, 4) Parent Education & Family Support. The work through the NGA grant and the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant provided a pioneer effort in Montana to begin to formalize communication and collaboration across multiple systems. Montana has accomplished many of the activities identified in the logic model, but has not completed the plan, therefore, plans to incorporate the strategic vision as one element of the Best Beginnings Advisory Council Strategic Plan.

The strategic goal of the Best Beginnings Early Childhood System in Montana is that Montana shall have a comprehensive, coordinated early childhood system that provides a

¹⁶ Information retrieved from the website of the National Governors Association (2010). Retrieved from www.nga.org

governance structure and leads to strong collaboration in order to best meet the needs of Montana's youngest citizens, and includes four system **principal objectives**:

- 5) Children have access to high quality Early Childhood Programs.
- 6) Families with young children are supported in their community.
- 7) Children have access to a medical home and health insurance.
- 8) Social, emotional, and mental health needs of young children and families are supported.

In addition to the principal objectives, there are essential elements identified to be present cross- system which are inclusive service delivery, cultural competency, access, affordability, quality, compensation, and consumer education. In order to accomplish these things, systemic collaboration and governance is needed. Additionally, while some aspects of the objectives are identified in one system category, they can easily be identified in other categories as well; as a result it is important to note that fluidity among system components is a constant in meeting the needs of children and families.

High Quality Early Childhood Programs

1) Early Learning Standards

Montana has statewide early learning standards for children ages 0-5. These guidelines are an attempt to describe what children need to know, experience and be able to do to reach their individual potential at various developmental stages and levels. By fall 2010, a curriculum will be available to assist early childhood practitioners in utilizing the

early learning guidelines to meet the needs of children in programs. Additionally, Montana has a child portfolio model using the Early Learning Guidelines, to support documentation of young children's work and progress. Montana has also created kindergarten guidelines and a model curriculum. The Model Full Time Kindergarten Curriculum Guide is aligned with the Montana State Content Standards and Essential Learning Expectations. The guide provides teachers with essential vocabulary and learning progressions for progress toward 4th grade benchmarks. Next steps include developing a crosswalk approach to compare the kindergarten standards and curriculum to the early learning guidelines. The Early Learning Guidelines for preschool children are due for assessment and potential revision. The Best Beginnings Advisory Council will provide oversight capacity for the revision process.

2) Best Beginnings STARS to Quality- Montana's revised Quality Improvement and Rating System

Best Beginnings STARS to Quality is a result of the current advisory council structure, and will continue as a large part of the strategic plan for the reformed Best Beginnings Advisory Council. STARS is not just a program, but an overarching system.

Best Beginnings STARS to Quality has the following components for:

- Quality Improvement Standards
- Accountability Measures
- Incentives, Resources, and Support to Early Childhood Programs and the workforce
- Parent and Consumer Education about quality child care and STARS ratings

STARS launched the field test beginning July 2010 and will undergo formal evaluation through a contract with Compass, Inc. for purposes of learning from the field test and planning for full statewide implementation using data driven information and outcomes. Best Beginnings STARS to Quality provides a framework for Head Start, Early Head Start, Child Care Centers, Family and Group Child Care Homes, and for tribal programs¹⁷. For detailed information about the field test, please see [Appendix 1](#). As a system, Best Beginnings STARS to Quality provides for a five star system matrix based upon what research tells us about indicators of quality early childhood programs, working to incorporate all essential components of a QRIS. Matrix standards include:

- Education, Training & Qualifications
- Staff/Caregiver to Child Ratios and Group Size
- Family and Community Partnerships
- Leadership and Program Management
- Environments for Care and Learning (health, wellness & safety, curriculum development and learning activities, relationships)

3) Professional Development

Montana has a statewide professional development system, workforce registry and career ladder for early childhood educators. Currently, the professional development system and work continues to evolve with the STARS initiative planning and development. In order for programs to offer high quality experiences for young

¹⁷ For detailed information about STARS, including the field test, see www.bestbeginnings.mt.gov

children, workforce development is fundamental. Staff turnover in the early childhood field is very high due to many factors. Compensation for teachers in early childhood is usually not comparable to other professions with similar requirements and negatively impacts the quality of care and education that Montana's young children receive. This also affects Montana's capacity to recruit, educate, and retain early childhood teachers. Montana has a continuum of professional development opportunities ranging from entry level to advanced training and education. While Montana has a strong system, there remain identified gaps that Montana plans to address in the future. Further collaboration around professional development for early care and education practitioners across sectors of service delivery and roles based upon shared professional competencies deserves increased attention. The development of a career ladder for the after school/school age workforce, a Montana director's certificate or credential for child care center directors, a directory for early childhood trainers that links to professional development opportunities, and increased expansion of and use of the Registry for early childhood practitioners are all areas worthy of focus.

The Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium continues to move forward with work focused upon higher education teacher and workforce preparation and access to specific coursework related to children birth through age eight. More comprehensive training relative to family and community partnerships, observation and assessment of young children, social/emotional foundations, cultural competency, early childhood curriculum content and methods, are just some of the areas that need further development. In addition, Montana understands that given the rural and

frontier nature of our state, identifying multiple methods for professional development is critical including distance learning, correspondence course work, and cluster training/support. According to Quesenberry and Doubet¹⁸ and research from Joyce and Showers (2002)¹⁹, in a study on the percent of participants who demonstrate knowledge, demonstrate new skills in a training setting, and apply and use the new skills obtained in the classroom, 95% of practitioners demonstrated increased knowledge, skills, and classroom application, who received professional development and had individualized coaching. Montana believes that comprehensive, sequential, and intensive training combined with coaching and support will lead to more qualified practitioners. As a result, Montana has built extensive coaching support into the Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Field Test.

4) Access to High Quality Services

Montana continues to emphasize the importance of maintaining eligibility for child care assistance at 150% of the current federal poverty level, and has attempted when funding allows keeping current at the 75th percentile of provider market rates. Montana does not have a waiting list for child care services at this time. Montana employs a sliding fee scale to delineate state contributions for child care and family copayment obligations. Montana's data and eligibility system manages child care for the CCDF block grant, TANF, Child Protective Services, and Working Caretaker Relatives.

¹⁸ Quesenberry, A. and Doubet, . (March 2010). *CSEFEL train the trainer*. Montana Early Childhood Services Bureau, Helena, MT.

¹⁹ Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (2002). Student achievement through professional development. In B. Joyce & B. Showers (Eds.), *Designing training and peer coaching: Our need for learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Montana subsidies can support state licensed or registered facilities, and informal care providers through a legally unregistered process. In looking at access, affordability, parental choice, and availability of care are all factors.

As discussed in the *Investments in Early Childhood*²⁰, a gap group exists for families in Montana who exceed the eligibility threshold for assistance but cannot afford child care due to other necessary living expenses, in which they do not have access to high quality care. Further, “less than one-third of children of working parents can be served at any one time”. It is assumed that the majority of these children not served are cared for in informal care or other systems not easily identified in our current data context. Finally, Montana created the STARS to Quality Program as an attempt to increase the level of quality early care and education, but taking that program to scale to provide high quality experiences for all children will remain the goal and a challenge for our state with limited funds and services. Montana also understands that by providing outreach to parents about the importance of high quality early childhood services; there must be supply to meet increased demand.

Related to informal care settings, Montana’s Legally Unregistered Program provides minimal expectation for this group of providers. However, Montana believes that this is a growing population of service providers and must not lose sight of their professional development and support needs. Montana is considering implementing the Center on Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL), Teaching

²⁰ Montana Department of Health and Human Services. (May 2008). *Investments in early childhood: The economic impact of the early care and education industry in montana*. Retrieved from http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/documents/economicimpactstudyfinal_001.pdf

Pyramid Parent Modules with informal care providers as a professional development program.

*Investments in Early Childhood*²¹ also reported that “the highest birth rates are found in the tribes, thus many of Montana’s young children are located on or near reservations. There is a growing need for care in these areas” (p.4). Through the Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (R&R) contract for services, several R&R agencies have formal memoranda of understanding with tribal programs to assist with dual eligibility for families through the CCDF grant, but also to provide referral services as well. Montana is moving to a statewide centralized referral system, but priority remains for providing services for all of Montana’s families.

Routinely, through the Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, child care provider capacity is assessed related to openings by age groups and geographic location. However, this has not been done formally for a long time and is an area that needs to be addressed again, specifically to infant toddler care, children with special needs, very rural populations, and non-traditional work hour populations. Finally, Montana looks at family friendly policies for public assistance programs as an access issue as well. Montana is embarking on policy revision to assure that Montana policies are as family friendly as possible, while also identifying potential gaps and barriers to family friendly policies.

5) Inclusion and Services for Children with Special Needs

²¹ Montana Department of Health and Human Services. (May 2008). *Investments in early childhood: The economic impact of the early care and education industry in montana*. Retrieved from http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/documents/economicimpactstudyfinal_001.pdf

Montana has in place an opportunity to support children with special needs who also qualify for subsidized child care. This process includes an assessment and then determining whether or not the family qualifies for additional funding support to serve the child in an early childhood setting. In the next 2 years, the program will be evaluated to determine if we are still meeting the needs of our children with special needs in the best way. Areas to consider for further partnership include stronger connections with local agencies serving children with disabilities and potentially expanding the service population. Additionally, the Best Beginnings Advisory Council will work to provide stronger links between similar service delivery agencies for children with special needs.

Family Support

1) Home Visiting

Montana is in the process of applying for the Health Care Reform Home Visiting grant funds through Montana's Maternal and Child Health Bureau. Currently, a needs assessment is gathering information in part related to home visiting models in Montana and home visiting services in Montana. This is helpful not only for the new home visiting funds, but to also assist Montana in identifying evidence based models, duplication, and gaps or challenges in service delivery areas.

2) PREVENT initiative

The PREVENT initiative is a pilot project focused on preventing child maltreatment through training and ongoing consultation in bonding/attachment between caregivers and infants. The goal for PREVENT is to serve additional

communities in the future. The emphasis is on how to apply the concepts/interventions learned to work more effectively with families and staff. The PREVENT Initiative is funded through the Children's Trust Fund through Child & Family Services.

3) The Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) Parent Modules²²

CSEFEL has created Parent Training Modules which provide information for families on how to promote children's social and emotional skills, understand their problem behavior, and use positive approaches to help children learn appropriate behavior. Additionally, trainings are designed to give parents general information on key strategies that may be used with all children. For early childhood programs participating in STARS, information on the CSEFEL pyramid model is formally introduced to parents at STAR Levels three and four through brochures, web based resources, and presentations at meetings with parents. At the fifth STAR level, parents have the opportunity to attend training on the CSEFEL parent modules sponsored by an individual program or community partners. Montana has identified the CSEFEL model as an opportunity to extend cross sector to support parents and practitioners. Future plans include cross sector training and CSEFEL pyramid model adoption.

4) Family friendly and business champions for early childhood

Through strong partnerships with the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at the University of Montana, the Dennis & Phyllis Washington Foundation, and the State Workforce Investment Board, and other business in Montana, efforts are

²² Center for Social Emotional Foundations for Learning (2010). Retrieved from www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel

underway to not only support employers in their efforts to support employees with young children, but to also build strong champions for early childhood education.

5) Parent Leadership and Family Support

Montana has funded several pilot projects related to parent leadership and training and has partnered with the Montana Parent Information and Resource Center to provide training and implementation. There are many models throughout Montana related to Parent Leadership and Family Support; however, this has not been formally tracked and should be a part of the strategic work plan for the Best Beginnings Advisory Council and needs assessment.

Parents of Head Start and Early Head Start children have opportunities to develop leadership skills and serve in leadership roles at the local, state, regional and national levels. Parents can serve on local Parent Policy Councils and represent the agency on local committees and boards. They may be selected as a representative to the Montana Head Start Association, with the possibility of being a parent representative for Montana on the Region VIII Head Start Association and National Head Start Association Boards. Parents also have the opportunity to participate in parent conferences, advocacy and leadership training offered throughout the year. Parents are eager and willing to take on leadership roles; however, it is very difficult for parents to make the time and financial commitment these roles require. Finding and paying for child care, requesting time off of work, and being away from home overnight are all barriers to full participation in leadership opportunities.

Traditionally, Montana has appointed parents to serve on the statewide advisory council as well; barriers are the same as listed above. Through the newly developed concept for the advisory council, the potential for greater parental input is addressed by strengthening community councils, attached to the Best Beginnings State Advisory Councils.

6) Transitions between programs and services

Through Best Beginnings STARS to Quality, indicators throughout the matrix for programs address family support including transition planning for children into another care or education setting, community referrals, parent teacher conferences, and opportunities for parent involvement and support. Additionally, this has been a priority agenda item for OPI's P-20 initiative, to ensure that children are supported as they transition into public school.

Health

1) Statewide Health Consultation and Coordination

Montana has contracted with the only operating Child Care Health Consultant in Montana to serve as a statewide health consultant/coordinator in which duties include creating, updating, and managing various health curricula for early childhood such as medication administration, safe sleep for infants, food safety and sanitation. Additional duties include serving as a liaison between local and state public/private health entities related to early childhood and in building strong networks of support in meeting the health needs of children in early care settings.

2) Immunization outreach

Montana ranks low in several immunization indicators. As a result, Montana is working strategically to increase immunization rates through a multi pronged approach, including consumer outreach, training and support for early childhood programs, immunization registry use, and continuing the “Every Child by Two” campaign.

3) Healthy Montana Kids

Healthy Montana Kids provides free or low cost health coverage for children and teenagers up to age 19. Enrollment partners extend across services to support families in getting health insurance. For example, a child care resource and referral agency may be an enrollment partner and can sign families up while processing child care applications too.

4) Oral health

As stated above, services for oral health is an identified need for low income children and families. Through a federal project, Montana is preparing to participate in a launch event focused on oral health. A state leadership team has been established and Montana is working closely with Dr. Kevin Rencher and Montana’s Dental Association. The goal is to reach each Tribal community and every small town in Montana so that all children have an equal opportunity to be healthy and ready to succeed.

5) Child Nutrition and Obesity Prevention

Many efforts are underway in Montana to promote physical activity and healthy eating for young children. A strategic plan is being written through the Montana Association for Physical Activity, and leaders from across the state have come together

to focus energy around this topic. Montana has also included health and wellness criteria in the Best Beginnings STARS to Quality program. Future opportunities include developing Montana Physical Activity and Nutrition Guidelines.

Social, Emotional, and Mental Health

1) The Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL)

Young children's challenging behavior is a significant issue in many early childhood programs. Early childhood teachers report increasing numbers of children with challenging behavior and increasing frustrations associated with dealing with challenging behavior.²³ The CSEFEL Pyramid Model has been adopted by the Best Beginnings STARS to Quality initiative to promote the social and emotional development of young children using universal practices built on a foundation of positive relationships, secondary interventions that address specific learning needs of children at risk for challenging behavior, and individualized interventions for children with persistent problems. The Montana Early Childhood Project, housed at Montana State University, appointed a CSEFEL coordinator to oversee CSEFEL activities within and outside of the QRIS.

Intense training and coaching are available across the state through the child care resource and referral agencies for early childhood program directors, classroom staff, and early interventionists who support children and families. The CSEFEL Model

²³ Hemmeter, M. L., Corso, R., & Cheatham, G. 2006, February) Issues in addressing challenging behaviors in young children: A national survey of early childhood educators. Paper presented at the Conference on Research Innovations in Early Intervention, San Diego, CA.

has also been incorporated into college level coursework. Coaching early childhood program staff who have received training on the Pyramid Model has been identified as key to the successfully implementing the Model. Coaching is a time intensive activity and having enough trained coaches to meet the needs of early childhood programs is a concern.²⁴ The Best Beginnings Advisory Council will include coaching and CSEFEL project expansion as part of its focus.

2) The Montana Children's System of Care (SOC)

The purpose of the SOC is to plan for an integrated and highly responsive system of care for high risk children with multi-agency needs who are seriously and emotionally disturbed (SED). Early childhood has representation on SOC and advocates for early intervention and coordination with the early care and education system and is promoting the CSEFEL Pyramid Model as a way to address the challenging behaviors of very young children in the system. However, the primary focus of the SOC has been on school age children. While the SOC Committees acknowledge the need for early identification and early intervention, very little if any progress has been made in this area.

3) Early childhood mental health service providers

AWARE, Inc. is a private nonprofit, statewide, mental health service provider and Early Head Start grantee that provides community-based services to individuals,

²⁴ Joyce, B., and Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

including children enrolled in a number of Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

AWARE staff recently participated in a two week CSEFEL “Train the Trainer” event and has plans to incorporate the CSEFEL Pyramid Model into their work programs, children, families and agency in-services.

Even with implementing the CSEFEL Pyramid Model through our QRIS and having one mental health service provider engaged in the effort, there are still gaps in providing mental health services to young children and families Montana. Programs and individuals providing early care and education outside of the QRIS field test need training and support in dealing with children’s challenging behavior, and when children are identified, many communities do not have mental health providers and practitioners skilled to work with young children. Transitioning preschool children with mental health and behavioral concerns into the public schools needs attention and direction.

4) The Office of Public Instruction’s (OPI) Montana Behavioral Initiative (MBI)

The MBI is a comprehensive staff development venture that improves the capacities of early childhood programs, schools and communities to meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of children in Montana. The MBI early childhood strand (targeted for children ages 3-5) was designed to specifically focus on strengthening the capacity of childcare, preschool, and Head Start programs to improve the social and emotional outcomes for all young children. Much of MBI’s early childhood efforts are based on the CSEFEL Pyramid Model. Efforts to coordinate MBI’s activities with CSEFEL and other trainings designed to support the social and emotional development of children is manage through OPI’s Early Childhood Partnership for

Professional Development. Working with programs who serve children younger than three has been discussed as well as system alignment and approach for the three to five populations are both challenges. Montana has limited resources and enhancing opportunities to extend programs without duplication is critical. This is something that can be addressed through the council and OPI's Early Childhood Partner for Professional Development group.²⁵

Coordination and Collaboration

As described above, many services and supports are available focused on early childhood through a multifaceted system statewide. While Montana sees a real and present need to ensure coordination and collaboration on behalf of the state's youngest citizens, Montana does not necessarily believe that all work needs to happen under one auspice. Additionally, Montana values the unique strengths and challenges within local communities and realizes that the State needs to be responsive in supporting local communities as they struggle with early childhood issues as well. Some local School Readiness teams have developed community level strategic plans and processes to address the needs of their community. Other communities struggle with this step.

Montana also places high emphasis on linguistic and cultural diversity within the state. The definitions of culture, cultural competency, and cultural diversity are as varied as the agencies that provide services across systems in Montana. It is understood that the role of culture is important, but understanding the concept is not a simple task. In order to gain insight, build awareness and plan for training around the topic of cultural competency,

²⁵ Office of Public Instruction (2010). Retrieved from www.opi.mt.gov

Montana is participating in the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Pathway to Cultural Competency Project. The goal of the project is to give early childhood programs that are participating in their states quality rating improvement system tools to help and guide them in reflecting and improving upon their use of culturally competent practices. It will also inform Montana's early childhood professional development system in planning training around the subject of cultural competency, which can be shared and coordinated across early childhood systems. This work will continue to be a focus of the Advisory Council and the hope is that Montana can create a systemic approach to ensuring strong cultural competency throughout the multifaceted system.

The newly conceptualized Best Beginnings Advisory Council is needed to ensure coordination and collaboration and to facilitate necessary partnerships, exchange of information, joint planning, and strategic communication and outreach. In Montana, some partnerships and collaborative efforts are stronger than others but this is a continual challenge. Barriers to collaboration at the state level relate generally to funding streams, lack of resources, or organizational division. Barriers to local collaboration generally relate to lack of resources and strategic direction.

While Montana has an Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Strategic Plan and many state plans specific to directed work, Montana does not have a formalized strategic plan that addresses local needs, and local/state needs, and state needs. The Advisory Council will provide oversight and direction in developing a formalized strategic plan as part of this funding proposal.

Early Childhood Data Sharing and Accountability

As with many states Montana has a variety of data gathering and tracking mechanisms. For early childhood related services, Montana is well positioned through the Child Care Under the Big Sky (CCUBS) system that tracks eligibility, contract management, and child care licensing. Additionally, through the Early Childhood Project, a Registry data system is available to track professional development and program specific information. Montana is also embarking on a contract with the Branagh software company to incorporate electronic assessment and quality improvement planning for the Best Beginnings STAR to Quality Field Test, related to Environmental and Administration Rating Scales. Child Protective Service Data exists in the CAPS system, Child & Adult Care Food Program exists in an individual data system through Gold Systems, Public Assistance Programs manage data through the CHIMES data system, and other systems exist for other program specific outcomes. Many systems have interface capabilities established. Managerial reports can be generated from individual systems generally.

Through a partnership with Montana's Office of Public Instruction, the Governor's Office, the Department of Public Health & Human Services, The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, and The Department of Labor and Industry, Montana applied for a statewide longitudinal data grant, and although the grant was not funded, Montana has a clearly identified plan related to longitudinal data system building and stronger state partnerships related to data. The goal of these state partnerships for longitudinal data is to allow for an entirely new mechanism for policy development in Montana driven by data-informed decision making processes and one that focuses on the whole child, family, educators, employees, and employers. Through a better use of the data the state may more

efficiently and effectively utilize resources to improve student achievement and meet policy objectives across the board. Barriers to the longitudinal data system include funding and prioritization.

Early Childhood Needs Assessment

As indicated throughout the project description, various Needs Assessments have been conducted to support program specific work. Montana does not have a comprehensive scan of all current needs assessments related to early childhood. As part of the Advisory Council work, a comprehensive scan and summary needs to be conducted, this will assist in identification of gaps, duplications, and future needs assessments. Additionally, as part of the council construct, strengthening efforts of locally designed school readiness teams to effectively assess community needs also needs addressed.

Subordinate Objectives:

Based on the information provided above under Need for Assistance, subordinate objectives are addressed in the following categories:

- 1) Governance, Collaboration and Coordination
- 2) High Quality Early Childhood Education
- 3) Family Support and Parent Leadership
- 4) Health
- 5) Social, Emotional, and Mental Health

Governance, Collaboration, and Coordination

Objective 1: Conduct a comprehensive scan of existing state level needs assessments.

Objective 2: Provide opportunity for local entities to establish formal community advisory councils, tied to the state council.

Objective 3: Assist local councils in assessing needs in local communities and developing community strategic early childhood plans.

Objective 4: Develop a periodic comprehensive needs assessment plan over three years with public input identifying strengths and gaps in services.

Objective 5: Develop a formal strategic plan for early childhood aligned with other State project/grant strategic and/or state plans and in response to needs assessment results.

Objective 6: Develop a strategic communication and outreach plan related to early childhood services in Montana.

Objective 7: Create a Montana specific cultural and linguistic competency framework for understanding and responsiveness across the early childhood system.

High Quality Early Childhood Education

Objective 1: Evaluate, revise, and align the Montana Early Learning Guidelines for ages 3-5 with Kindergarten standards and Early Childhood Higher Education student learner outcomes.

Objective 2: Continue Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Field Test and determine best practices, effective methodology, approach, and needs to provide opportunity for all providers to participate in the STARS to Quality Program, including centers, family and group providers, Head Start, Early Head Start, Public Preschool, School Age Programs, and possibly informal care providers.

Objective 3: Develop a career ladder for the after school/school age workforce that aligns with the current Montana Early Care and Education Career Ladder.

Objective 4: Develop a Center Director's Credential program and process.

Objective 5: Enhance the Trainer Directory and establish firm trainer and coach qualifications which may include credentialing and identification of professional development needs for trainers/coaches.

Objective 6: Continue to focus on workforce preparation with identification of common and specific coursework and comprehensive training in specialty areas for early childhood. Expand professional development opportunities to serve the needs of all practitioners in Montana, including distance learning.

Objective 7: Continue to enhance Montana's coaching model and repertoire through increased awareness, training, and support.

Objective 8: Utilizing information from the Best Beginnings STARS to Quality evaluation findings and various needs assessments, identify other professional development needs to include in the comprehensive strategic plan.

Objective 9: Continue to assure that low income families have access to high quality early childhood programming by maintaining a sliding fee scale with the current federal poverty index.

Objective 10: Develop innovative models to address underrepresented populations and or families that are over income for assistance but still face difficulty in affording child care.

Objective 11: Strengthen informal care provider networks, policies, and professional development opportunities.

Objective 12: Formally assess child care capacity by age group, geographic location, special needs, and non-traditional hours through the comprehensive periodic needs assessment.

Objective 13: Identify gaps and barriers to family friendly policies and implement family friendly policy changes when appropriate in early childhood programs.

Objective 14: Conduct a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis and assessment of gaps and duplication of services related to the Special Needs Subsidy program and address innovative approaches to maintain effective service delivery.

Family Support

Objective 1: Identify gaps, duplications and models statewide related to home visitation models, programs, and services.

Objective 2: Expand and align program expectations and approaches related to implementation of CSEFEL Teaching Pyramid Model cross system including mental health services, early care and education services, family support services, and public education. Develop an action plan for parent training and education using the CSEFEL Parent Modules in partnership with other state wide services for families.

Objective 3: As part of the comprehensive early childhood needs assessment scan and needs assessment tool, identify family support models statewide that address family support, parent education and leadership.

Objective 4: Develop innovative approaches utilizing best practices to support children and families as they transition between programs and services, and into public school.

Health

Objective 1: Strengthen collaborative relationships among local public health authorities and early care and education services.

Objective 2: Increase Montana’s rankings related to immunization utilization, especially in relation to the early childhood population.

Objective 3: Develop innovative approaches to accessing dental care services for low income and rural populations.

Objective 4: Develop Montana Physical Activity and Nutrition Guidelines for early childhood.

Social, Emotional, and Mental Health

Objective 1: Strengthen and expand the CSEFEL Pyramid Model for practitioners and parents, cross system.

Objective 2: Continue to build a repertoire of coaching professionals related to CSEFEL and social emotional support.

Objective 3: As part of the strategic comprehensive scan of services, identify early childhood mental health service providers statewide and build bridges related to supporting young children with behavioral needs and their families.

Objective 4: Develop a strong partnership between DPHHS and OPI MBI in expanding the CSEFEL Pyramid Model and assuring fidelity of the CSEFEL approach for early childhood professionals working with children 0-5.

Approach

Council Structure

The Best Beginnings Advisory Council will serve as the comprehensive early childhood advisory council and will serve as the collaborating entity for the early childhood system. The Early Childhood Services Bureau within DPHHS will serve as the home for the Advisory Council. A staff person will be hired as Best Beginnings Coordinator to provide coordination of the council itself, the activities of the council, and to support the work of the comprehensive strategic plan and manage the grant, in addition to ECCS activities. ECCS activities are not yet identified for this position, an analysis of the strategic plans and activities will be conducted to assist in this process. The position is expected to be advertised in the fall 2010.

The Advisory Council will also serve as the connector, especially through key appointments and staff to the council, to the Governor's Office subcabinet, the DPPHS branch management structure, and other early childhood work groups. The Governor's Office subcabinet provides opportunity for various agency directors to join together around content and targeted areas. In this case, the subcabinet would organize around broader early childhood systems issues as needed to support the strategic plan. To do this well, representatives of other work groups will be asked to join Best Beginnings Council committees as ad hoc members or as appointed members if appropriate. The coordinator may also be asked to join other work groups. Duties of the coordinator/early childhood

services bureau chief will also include at least quarterly briefing meetings to the Governor's office subcabinet and the DPHHS branch managers.

As stated earlier in the project description, Montana intends to establish at least four formalized local community councils, in which the activities of the community councils will be approved by the State council. One representative from each local council can be determined to sit on the Best Beginnings State Advisory Council. The coordinator will assist community councils as well. Applications will be available for communities to submit proposals to become a formal Best Beginnings Community Council.

The Best Beginnings Advisory Council shall be composed of the following appointees, including volunteers and ex officio members that are already employees of State Government. Ex officio members are given a represented position on the Council because of another position they hold in state government or as a contract partner. In regard to the Best Beginnings State Advisory Council, ex officio members are encouraged to be active participants in the council in establishing priorities, including priorities in their current work role. Ex-officio members may face dual roles in that they serve as an advisory capacity with the collective whole of the Council, but are likely to also receive advisory guidance from the Council for their state work. In order to meet the intentions of a comprehensive early childhood system, all early childhood system partners must be willing to set aside individual biases as appropriate to work collaboratively in the best interest of the children and families we serve. It is assumed; however, that the Best Beginnings Advisory Council is advisory and the discretion on execution of activities lies within the responsibility of state government.

Ex officio members should not serve as council or committee chairpersons. Montana is in a transition process between two council constructs. For that reason, members have not been appointed for the newly constructed Best Beginnings State Advisory Council but will be in the fall of 2010, with a first meeting scheduled in January 2011. Therefore, names of individuals cannot be placed in some categories until official appointments have been made. The State Council Membership is listed in the following chart.

Volunteer	Ex- Officio/Administrative
Parent	Jamie Palagi, Early Childhood Services Bureau Chief ** (child care)
Child Care Providers (1 center, 1 group, 1 family) **	Office of Public Instruction Cabinet Member **
Head Start Association	Office of Public Instruction Early Grades Specialist**
Christy Hill Larson, Statewide CSEFEL coordinator	Bob Runkel, Disability Services Division Administrator ** (Part C and Children's Mental Health)
Early Childhood Higher Education **	Maternal and Child Health Bureau Staff** (health)
Montana Child Care Association	Becky Fleming-Siebenaler, Child Care Licensing
Shelly Meyer, Statewide health consultant coordinator	Mary Musil, Child & Adult Care Food Program
Child Care Resource & Referral Network	Mary Jane Standaert, Head Start State Collaboration Director**
Business/State Workforce Investment Board	Libby Hancock, Professional Development- Early Childhood Project
Montana Association for the Education of Young Children	Public Assistance
Child & Adult Care Food Program Sponsors	Child Protective Services
Philanthropy	Department of Labor &

	Industry Staff
Representatives from each of the formalized local councils	
Tribal CCDF (7 tribes)	
Organized Labor-Union	

** required by the Head Start Act in accord with grant funds

Council members in volunteer status are reimbursed travel, per diem, and child care related expenses when appropriate. Required membership for community councils are listed below:

Local Education Entity**
Parents
Child Care Resource & Referral Agency
Public Health Department
Business
Head Start/Early Head Start
Services for children with special needs
Local chapter of Montana Child Care Association
Local chapter of Montana Association for the Education of Young Children
County Commissioner
Child Care Providers
Mental Health
Family Support Agencies

** required by the Head Start Act in accord with grant funds

Community Councils can determine additional membership as they see fit and provide a detailed list in their applications. Montana understands that the State Council is required under the Head Start Act to also have representation from Local Education Agencies, it is the hope that the granting agency will accept that Montana believes a stronger option is to require this

representation at the community council level. If the granting agency prefers otherwise, Montana will appoint this category to the state council.

Council members will be appointed for three year terms. In the event a council member is unable to attend a council meeting, that member may work with the coordinator to assign another representative in their place. Council meetings will occur at a minimum three times per year, and committees may meet in addition when necessary. Montana will work to utilize webinar and conference call meetings to reduce the burden to individuals and to maintain costs. Community Councils will be required to meet at least four times per year, and meetings should occur prior to the state advisory council meetings.

For the State Advisory Council, the following committees are established.

1) Professional Development

In the spirit of collaboration and consolidation of meetings, the Montana Early Care and Education Career Development Advisory Board will convert to the Professional Development Committee. Representation on this committee will be comprised of some official council members and can include ad hoc membership as well. At a minimum, representation on this committee will include: Child Care Resource & Referral Provider Services, Head Start Association, Montana Public Broadcasting Service, Inclusion and Special Needs Services, Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium, Montana Department of Labor and Industry, Professional Provider Associations, Office of Public Instruction (Early Childhood Partnership for Professional Development/Early Grades Specialist), Early Childhood Services Bureau, Health, Family & Consumer Sciences.

The Professional Development committee will be led by the Early Childhood Project and will formally connect to the Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium and the OPI Early Childhood Partnership for Professional Development for purposes of drawing strong linkages and to ensure the comprehensive strategic plan is executed. It will be necessary for the professional development committee to work closely with many of the other council committees as well.

2) High Quality Early Care and Education

This committee will take on the role similar to the former Montana Early Childhood Advisory Council quality committee. Representation on this committee will include official members of the council and can include ad hoc members as well.

Membership shall include: child care licensing, career development, provider representation, professional provider association representatives, and parents, Child Care Resource & Referral Network, Child and Adult Care Food Program.

3) Supporting Families

This committee will address broad family support needs including family friendly policies, general family service policy review, family support and parent leadership, services to children including children with special needs. Representation on this committee will include official members of the council and can include ad hoc membership as well. Membership shall include: parents, Child Care Resource & Referral network, Child Protective Services, Public Assistance. The committee will work

to have formalized ties with the Family Support Advisory Council (Part C) and also OPI (Part B) of the IDEA.

4) Health and Social, Emotional Health

This committee will be led by the State Health Consultation Coordinator and State CSEFEL Coordinator. Membership on this committee shall include: Developmental Disabilities, Children's Mental Health, Family and Community Health, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Child Care Licensing, Providers. This committee will also formalize connections to the Systems of Care (SOC) work group and OPI Montana Behavioral Initiative.

5) Strategic Communications, Outreach and Public Awareness

This committee takes on the role of the former Montana Early Childhood Advisory Council Public Policy committee and will monitor the progress of needs assessments and strategic planning. Membership should include: business, philanthropy, government leadership, council coordinator, ECCS/Head Start State Collaboration, Child Care Resource & Referral Network, and Provider Associations. In addition to the Advisory Council committee, a separate work group is connected that is comprised of state government, specifically DPHHS, individuals working on a united, coordinated message for all programs and services for young children. This work group includes the following representatives: Healthy Montana Kids, Children's Mental Health, DPHHS Public Information, Public Health and Safety, Family and Community Health, Medicaid Services, Child Protective Services, Services to Children with

Developmental Disabilities, Public Assistance, Child Care Licensing, and Head Start State Collaboration. The committee chair person and staff to the committee will work closely to build bridges and provide for exchange of information among the two groups. This committee will work closely with all other council committees as well.

Goals, Objectives, Activities, Timeline, Action Plan

Described in detail on the following charts. Some objectives mentioned on previous pages connect throughout the chart and are not duplicated by category.

Governance, Collaboration, and Coordination			
Objective	Activity	Responsibility	Timeline
1. Coordinator Hired	a. position description approved through Human Resources b. position advertised c. interviews conducted d. position filled	Jamie Palagi, Early Childhood Services Bureau Chief	Year 1/ Quarter 1
2. State Council fully appointed	a. DPHHS Agency order for council updated b. Request for nominations and interests c. Nominations appointed	Jamie Palagi, Early Childhood services Bureau Chief and Best Beginnings Coordinator, DPHHS Director, Governor's Office	Year 1/Quarter 1
3. Local Community Councils Established	a. criteria for local councils established b. application developed c. application released d. applications	Best Beginnings Coordinator/ Head Start State Collaboration Director	Year 1/ Quarter 1

	reviewed e. community councils selected		
4. State Advisory Council members orientation	a. council binders and information provided b. development of procedural roles and processes, committee work c. review and update guiding principles, mission d. expectations of the council e. council construct	Best Beginnings Coordinator/ all council members	Year 1/Quarter 2 and ongoing as necessary
5. Support community council development	a. orientation, determine council organizational capacity b. council coordination c. guiding principles d. development of procedural roles and processes	Best Beginnings Coordinator/ community council coordinators	Year 1/Quarter 2 and ongoing as necessary
6. Hold state advisory council meetings	a. set meeting dates at first January meeting b. agenda development & public notice c. public comment periods at all meetings d. minutes posted for public view	State Advisory Council/ Best Beginnings Coordinator	Year 1/ Quarter 2, 3, 4 Year 2-3/Quarter 1,2,3
7. Hold community council meetings	a. set meeting dates b. agenda development/public notice c. public comment periods at all meetings minutes posted for	Community Council Coordinator/ supported by Best Beginnings Coordinator/Community Council Coordinators	Year 1/ Quarter 2, 3, 4 Year 2-3/ all 4 quarters

	public view		
8. Comprehensive scan of existing state level needs assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. review state plans, past needs assessments, hold informational interviews b. obtain copies of needs assessments c. develop a database of state level needs assessments data points and findings d. cross walk various assessments to identify duplications and gaps e. generate a report for the council and seek input on future needs assessment inquiries. 	Best Beginnings Coordinator/possible contractor for needs assessment scan and study- through RFP process	Year 1/ Quarter 3, 4
9. Develop comprehensive needs assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. develop a strategic needs assessment plan to gain information not already obtained or identified in the grant b. conduct needs assessment c. formalize a report including findings from community needs assessments (next objective) d. present to the council and other assigned parties e. develop recommendations for a strategic plan 	Best Beginnings Coordinator/possible contractor for needs assessment through RFP process	Year 2/ Quarters 1, 2
10. Assist local councils in assessing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. work with community councils 	Community Council Coordinators/ Technical	Year 1/ Quarter 3, 4 Year 2/ Quarter 1

needs in communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> on developing a plan for assessing need b. develop a needs assessment template for community councils c. conduct community needs assessment 	Assistance by Best Beginnings Coordinator	
11. Develop a formal strategic plan for early childhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. coordinate with existing state plans, identified needs in grant proposal, and recommendations of council b. incorporate needs assessment findings into comprehensive strategic plan - develop plan based on identified needs in grant and revise or extend based on results of needs assessments and periodic review of strategic plan c. assist community councils in developing strategic plans 	Best Beginnings Coordinator/ Head Start State Collaboration Coordinator/ Early Childhood Services Bureau/Advisory Council/Community Council	Year 1 -3 ongoing
12. Strategic Communication & Outreach Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. identify various messages within the State around early childhood b. determine most effective methods for messaging c. create a timeline/action plan d. develop Best Beginning STARS to Quality promotional strategy e. identify most 	Best Beginnings Coordinator/DPHHS Best Beginnings Strategic Communications Work Group/Best Beginnings Advisory Council	Year 1-3 ongoing

	effective outreach strategy to promote high quality to underrepresented populations		
13. Develop a comprehensive strategic budget document as part of the strategic scanning and building process	a. Identify all funding sources contributing to the Comprehensive Systems efforts b. Identify funded activities (federal, state) c. create a correlative picture related to funds and strategic activities	Best Beginnings Coordinator/ Early Childhood Services Bureau/ Head Start State Collaboration Director	Year 2
14. Cultural Competency Framework and Training Plan	a. Participate in NAEYC technical assistance project b. conduct cultural competency assessment with pilot programs c. align cultural competency assessment with QRIS d. develop cultural competency training e. pilot cultural competency training	Statewide CSEFEL Coordinator	Year 1-3 ongoing
High Quality Early Childhood Education			
Objective	Activity	Responsibility	Timeline
1. Montana's Early Learning Guidelines 3-5	a. cross walk 3-5 ELGs with Kindergarten standards b. cross walk 3-5 ELGs with Higher Education Student Learner Outcomes and federal priorities c. establish a review	Montana Early Childhood Project/ Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium and assigned work groups	Year 2/Quarter 3, 4 Year 3/ Quarter 1, 2

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and revision process to update ELG's 3-5 d. develop a revision timeline and budget e. seek public comment and feedback f. revise guidelines 		
2. Best Beginnings STARS to Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. continue field test b. conduct evaluation c. report findings d. hold public forums on lessons learned through field test e. revise criteria if needed as a result f. develop plan for increased participation 	Early Childhood Services Bureau/ Best Beginnings Advisory Council/ Stakeholders	Year 1-3 Ongoing
3. Career Ladder for Afterschool/School Age Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. identify need b. research other national models c. survey providers d. develop work group e. draft ladder, align with early care and education career ladder f. seek public comment g. pilot career ladder criteria with workforce h. implement career ladder 	Early Childhood Project/ Professional Development Committee/Afterschool Care Constituents	Year 3 /All 4 quarters
4. Center Director Credential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Using Director's Symposium, bring in national expert b. identify need, barriers, and opportunities 	Early Childhood Project/ Professional Development Committee/ Director's Symposium/ Best Beginnings Advisory	Year 1-3 ongoing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. research best practices d. develop criteria and curriculum e. pilot credential f. develop incentives and/or recognition 	Council	
5. Professional Development Specialist (PDS) Directory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. launch the PDS framework for trainers and link to training approval process b. Implement PDS directory for coaches as coaching system is developed to support STARS, CSEFEL, etc. c. Provide ongoing professional development for trainers and coaches. 	Early Childhood Project/Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium/CSEFEL Coordinator/Early Childhood Services Bureau	Year 1-3 ongoing
6. Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. using information from needs assessment and results from STARS, evaluate current professional development opportunities b. revise and/or create new opportunities c. develop a plan periodic updates of existing curricula d. continue to align, promote and enhance college course work and degreed programs e. determine potential for early childhood endorsement in K-12 	Early Childhood Project/ ECSB/ CCR&Rs/ EC Higher Education Consortium/Professional Development Committee/other stakeholders and partners	Year 1-3 ongoing

	f. expand distance learning and correspondence professional development		
7. Expand Montana's coaching network, support, and model	a. learn from the STARS field test challenges and successes b. identify other coaching models to infuse in supporting coaches c. develop a professional development framework and plan for certification of coaches d. develop plan to expand the number of coaches e. establish a coaching and CSEFEL track at the school readiness summit	Head Start State Collaboration Office/ Early Childhood Services Bureau/ CCR&Rs/ CSEFEL Coordinator/ STARS participants and coaches/OPI MBI	Year 1-3 ongoing
8. Access for low income families to high quality child care	a. work with executive planning process and legislature to continue state funding for current sliding fee scale b. conduct market rate survey annually & address market rate fluctuations c. promote high quality care d. analyze variable rate structures for subsidized child care	Early Childhood Services Bureau/ Best Beginnings Advisory Council/Family Support Committee	Year1-3 ongoing
9. Service delivery use and barriers	a. as part of the needs assessment,	Early Childhood Services Bureau/Best Beginnings	Year 2/Quarters 1, 2 Year 3/ all quarters

	<p>assess child care capacity, and usage trends</p> <p>b. identify barriers to using high quality early childhood services</p> <p>c. conduct SWOT analysis and assessment gaps and duplication of service related to the special needs subsidy program</p> <p>d. work with community councils to receive localized data</p> <p>e. develop plan to address findings</p> <p>f. make recommendations for policy change and or pilot projects</p>	Coordinator/ CCR&Rs/ Advisory Council/ Family Support Committee/ Child Care Plus+	
10. Strengthen informal care services	<p>a. identify best practices nationwide</p> <p>b. assess interest from informal care providers</p> <p>c. provide free training for informal care providers</p> <p>d. consider regulatory requirements</p> <p>e. identify barriers to professional development</p> <p>f. incorporate CSEFEL parent modules into orientation for this service population</p> <p>g. clarify and revise policies in the child</p>	Early Childhood Services Bureau/ CCR&Rs	Year 1/Quarters 3, 4 Year 2-3 ongoing

	care policy manual		
11. Family Friendly Policies	a. review current policies b. identify nationwide best practices c. identify gaps and barriers to family friendly policies d. identify opportunities for express lane eligibility e. evaluate categorical and extended eligibility periods f. revise policy manuals	Best Beginnings Council/ Family Support Committee/ Early Childhood Services Bureau	Year 1-3 ongoing
Family Support			
Objective	Activity	Responsibility	Timeline
1. Home visiting programs and services statewide.	a. identify home visiting services across the state. b. collect information on approach and types of home visiting. c. evaluate evidence based. d. identify gaps and duplications, barriers. e. expand home visiting services through Family & Community Health Bureau.	Family and Community Health Bureau/ Best Beginnings Coordinator/	Year 1-3 ongoing
2. CSEFEL Pyramid Model implementation for parents	a. expand CSEFEL parent module opportunities statewide b. work with early intervention, children's mental health, child protective services to	Statewide CSEFEL Coordinator/ ECSB/ CSEFEL coaches/ Head Start State Collaboration Office	Year 1-3 ongoing

	determine appropriateness of CSEFEL Parent Modules training c. work with community councils and Head Start/Early Head Start programs to incorporate parent modules		
3. Strengthen transition support for children and families as they transition into public school	a. continue STARS field test b. identify best practices c. utilize community councils to support transitions locally d. determine innovative approaches and pilots to support transitions e. address community referrals f. assess success with transition profiles	Best Beginnings Coordinator/ Advisory Council (State and Community), OPI, Family Support Committee/ Head Start State Collaboration Office	Year 1-3 ongoing
Health			
Objective	Activity	Responsibility	Timeline
1. Strengthen collaborative relationships	a. provide mechanisms for public health and early care and education providers to interact frequently b. continue STARS field test c. develop opportunities for expanded consultation from public health e. create multifaceted health related professional development	Statewide Health Consultant Coordinator	Year 1-3 ongoing

	opportunities		
2. Increase the early childhood population's prevalence of immunizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. develop a training for early childhood practitioners on documenting and tracking immunizations b. continue STARS field test c. create opportunities for public health departments to support early childhood providers in immunization tracking d. increase awareness of immunization importance 	Statewide Health Consultant Coordinator/State Immunization Program/Community Councils	Year 1/Quarter 2-4 and ongoing
3. Expand dental services and outreach to low income and rural populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. continue with oral health launch program b. identify gaps and barriers to services c. develop innovative models for outreach d. work closely with Montana dental association e. identify best practices nationwide 	Head Start State Collaboration Director/ Statewide Health Consultant Coordinator/ identified stakeholders/State Advisory Council/Community Councils	Year 1-3 ongoing
4. Montana Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Continue to promote recommendations of NAPA early childhood planning group b. Focus on specific nutrition guidelines above and beyond CACFP, increased activity/movement, decreased screen 	Early Childhood Project/ Statewide Health Consultation Coordinator/ Montana Nutrition and Physical Activity Association/CACFP	

	<p>time</p> <p>c. Promote breastfeeding support in early childhood programs</p> <p>d. Collaborate to identify training needs focused on each goal and develop plans to design and deliver statewide training</p> <p>e. Create partnerships to address goals across sectors and include in the comprehensive needs assessment</p>		
Social, Emotional, and Mental Health			
Objective	Activity	Responsibility	Timeline
1. CSEFEL Pyramid Model implementation	<p>a. continue STARS to Quality Field Test</p> <p>b. strengthen CSEFEL model in Montana early care and education programs</p> <p>c. create a modified pyramid training for family/group child care programs</p> <p>d. formalize the coaching support</p> <p>e. identify challenges and successes as a result of the CSEFEL adoption in MT.</p> <p>f. develop a plan for stronger linkages to OPI MBI and CSEFEL</p> <p>g. create further training opportunity for CSEFEL through School Readiness Summit and cross</p>	Statewide CSEFEL Coordinator/ ECSB/ CSEFEL coaches/OPI MBI	Year 1-3 ongoing

	sector h. expand CSEFEL parent module opportunities statewide		
2. other Mental Health Objectives are addressed in earlier objectives through the needs assessment and other categories			

Public Hearing(s) and Comment

To support the requirements of the Request for Proposal, Montana provided notice to interested parties and posted public comment opportunity announcements on the www.bestbeginnings.mt.gov website related to the Best Beginnings State Advisory Council Proposal. The draft proposal was available for public comment for a period of one week. Montana understands the ongoing need for public comment and feedback, as well as transparency. As a result, requirements of local council applications will be to conduct community public hearings to assure community representation and interest. Additionally, all council meetings, statewide and community, will include public posting of agendas, minutes, and reports, and will also include public comment opportunities throughout the meetings. Once a formalized comprehensive needs assessment report is developed, Montana will provide opportunity for public hearing and feedback prior to developing the formalized strategic plan. Throughout the strategic plan, Montana plans to incorporate public comment processes at least annually. Historically in Montana, the early childhood system has worked diligently to

incorporate ongoing feedback and stakeholder involvement through the former Montana Early Childhood Advisory Council, public forums, and roundtables.

Sustainability

As stated previously, Montana has historically had an early childhood advisory council, in which federal block grant funds were used to support the council for purposes of coordination and collaboration. While the council construct is changing slightly, Montana is already positioned to sustain an advisory council beyond this three year grant period. Community Councils will be told upfront in the application process that funds are limited for a 3 year period, and as part of their needs assessment and strategic plan, sustainability strategies must be addressed. Through combining the ECCS grant and other state funded activities now, sustainability of a state level Best Beginnings Coordinator should remain based on the allowable costs and activities within those grants. Much of the work that is outlined in the 3 year grant period expands on current state activities and provides for a systematic foundation to lay the ground work for activities for years to come.

Staff and Position Data

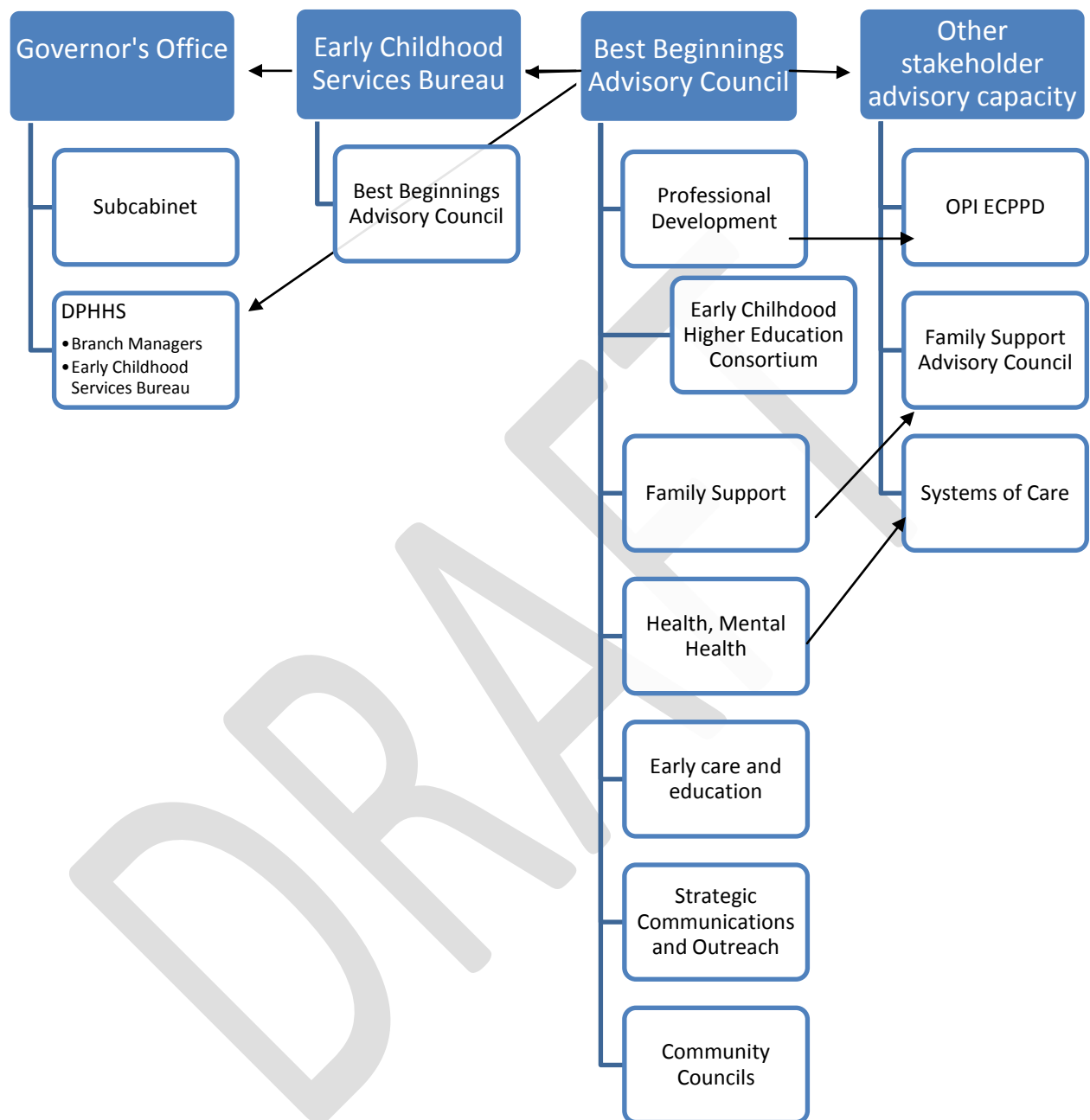
Montana has not yet hired the Best Beginnings Coordinator. A draft job description is included as Appendix 3. A Resume for Jamie Palagi, Early Childhood Services Bureau Chief, is also included as Appendix 4.

Organizational Profile

On behalf of the Governor's Office, the Early Childhood Services Bureau with the Department of Public Health and Human Services is designated as the agency responsible for management of the Best Beginnings State Advisory Council and community councils tied to the

statewide council. A letter from the Governor's Office is included as Appendix 5. Under the direction of the Early Childhood Services Bureau Chief, a Best Beginnings Coordinator will be hired to support the council and activities of the council. The Employer Identification Number for the State of Montana is 81-0302402. The following chart represents the council and its connections related to committees, and the executive branch regarding organizational capacity. It is understood that the council advises state activities.

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Third Party Agreements

Montana anticipates entering into third party agreements with at least four community council administrative and fiscal agents. This will be conducted through a formal application process and will follow Montana's contract and procurement process. Funds will be contracted to support part time coordinators of the community councils. Additionally, Montana may enter into third party agreements to support the comprehensive scan of needs assessments and to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment. Again, this would be done through a formal application/RFP process. Specific details are not yet available and will depend on the direction of the council. The budget section provides detail related to community councils.

Budget

Three Year Project Budget for Council Construct

Description	Grant Year 2010		Grant Year 2011		Grant Year 2012	
	Federal	State	Federal	State	Federal	State
Best Beginnings State Coordinator Salary & Fringe	\$ 65,020*		\$65,020*		\$65,020*	
Best Beginnings State Coordinator Office Expense	\$ 6,642*		\$ 6,642*		\$ 6,642*	
Contracted Community Coordinator Wages	\$ 80,000		\$80,000		\$80,000	
Council Travel	\$ 11,400		\$11,400		\$11,400	
Supplies	\$ 5,000		\$ 5,000		\$ 5,000	
Needs Assessment and Strategic Planning	\$ 15,500		\$ 15,500		\$ 15,500	
Cost Allocation	\$ 5,600		\$ 5,600		\$ 5,600	
Council Meeting Expense	\$ 7,500*		\$ 7,500*		\$ 7,500*	
Council Activities consistent with strategic plan	\$ 49,000	\$388,887	\$ 49,000	\$388,887	\$ 49,500	\$ 388,887
Total	\$245,662	\$388,887	\$245,662	\$388,887	\$246,162	\$388,887

* Portion of Non-federal resources: other federal funds aside from State Advisory Council funds

Total combined Federal over 3 years (not used for match purposes)	State Advisory Council ARRA	Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant	Child Care & Development Fund
\$737,486	\$500,000	\$214,986	\$ 22,500

Budget Narrative

Best Beginnings State Coordinator Salary & Fringe: Coordinator wages are calculated at \$25 per hour for 2080 hours. Fringe is calculated at 25% of the wage of \$52,015 and will be \$13,004. The Best Beginnings State Coordinator will be responsible for the activities as determined by the Best Beginnings Council and will also take on coordination activities consistent with the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant. The work and priorities as directed by the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant align with the expected work of the Best Beginnings Advisory Council, and combining staff time and energies is a cost effective and systemic approach to blend funding for the entire system. The Early Childhood Services Bureau is already designated as the managing entity for the Department of Public Health and Human Services for the ECCS grant and activities. Current fiscal year grant funds for the ECCS grant are \$132,000. This has remained relatively stable from year to year.

Best Beginning State Coordinator Office Expense: Office expense is calculated based on established rent disbursement, which is documented at 443.50 per month. Ongoing phone and communication cost are \$110 per month.

Contracted Community Coordinators: At a minimum, Montana is looking to fund at least four well positioned community school readiness teams/early childhood coalitions to merge into formalized Best Beginnings Community Councils. In order to be eligible for funds, the councils must designate a viable fiscal agent that will hire a part time coordinator to direct and expand community strategic planning and activities. Communities will submit budgets. For state budget purposes no more than \$20,000 per community team will be awarded through a

competitive application process with clearly identified strategic planning processes, council activities, alignment to the state strategic plan, and sustainability provisions.

Council Travel: Volunteer appointed council members, not Ex Officio members, will be provided travel, per diem, and when appropriate child care related costs. Child Care related costs would be paid based on state determined formula for parents if they incurred child care costs because of traveling to the council meeting, or child care providers who needed to hire substitute care givers so that they could attend the state council meeting. Council meeting expense is estimated for 26 volunteer appointed council members and is based on historical expense incurred from the former Montana Early Childhood Advisory Council. Historically costs ran at \$3800 per meeting. The Best Beginnings Advisory Council will meet three times per year.

Supplies: Supplies are estimated at \$5000 annually and include computer and office related equipment under \$5000 for purposes of supporting the council. Additionally, expense for meeting support materials including: orientation materials, nametags, office supplies, resource materials, printing and graphics related expenses.

Needs Assessment and Strategic Planning: Costs related to the needs assessment are estimated based on historic related costs for comprehensive survey and evaluation, and may include contracted services in formatting, and evaluation of results. This is estimated at \$10,000 annually, with remaining funds supporting data collection tools including postcards, surveys, mailing material and postage, web site use and enhancement if needed, web based meetings. This is estimated at \$5,500 annually.

Cost Allocation: This estimated by the Department of Public Health and Human Services Fiscal Office based on a standard methodology for all department and government related cost

allocation expenses to cover ancillary and administrative supports to conduct business. This is estimated at \$5,600 annually.

Council Meeting Expenses: This is another federal source of funding through the Child Care and Development Fund, that is already purposed to support advisory council meetings and activities, and will be used to support committee meetings in addition to the larger council meetings for specific committee work as needed. This is estimated at the historic expense of \$3800 per meeting for travel, per diem, meeting preparation.

Council Activities Consistent with the Strategic Plan: The objectives outlined in the grant proposal include activities already identified, but does not include future activities identified as a result of the needs assessment and comprehensive strategic plan. Potential costs associated include: direct services as a result of the strategic plan; strategic communication and outreach related costs through development of marketing materials, and outreach; development of documents, curriculum, professional services, consultation, etc.

Non federal resources: Montana meets its match requirement through council activities related to child care scholarships (subsidies). As identified in the objectives, Montana is committed to continual access and support for low income children and children receiving child protective services in early childhood programs. Montana has state general fund dollars, over and above required match funds and Maintenance of Effort funds, used to meet the 70% match requirements of the Advisory Council grant, to continue serving low income families at 150% of the current federal poverty index and to respond to caseload needs. These funds contribute to the comprehensive early childhood services continuum in the amount of a combined \$1,166,662 over the three year grant period.

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